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Pollard Spy Case Stirs Media Flap

Charges and Countercharges Fly in American and Israeli Press

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JERUSALEM, Nov. 30—A series of charges and countercharges in the Israeli media surrounding the affair of accused spy Jonathan Jay Pollard carries undertones of fierce political infighting that once again could threaten to unravel Israel's fragile coalition government.

Israel's freewheeling and intensely competitive Hebrew-language daily newspapers, mirrored by a number of foreign correspondents based here, have joined in a chorus of widely varying theories about who was responsible for the alleged spying activities of Pollard and how high up the ministerial ladders knowledge of the espionage operation went.

Pollard is a civilian U.S. Navy intelligence analyst who is accused of selling classified documents to Israeli contacts in Washington.

Behind the theories, some of which have been confirmed by informed and responsible government sources and some of which have not, appear to lie the ingredients for a political battle that has the potential to cause the collapse the national unity government of Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

There have been indications that the political protagonists in the struggle have sought to shade the truth with self-serving and carefully planted leaks that have pointed the finger of guilt in several directions, creating confusion.

Government officials with Labor Party connections have sought to trace the scandal back to the previous, Likud-led administration, while officials identified with the Likud bloc have attempted to implicate top Labor ministers. The coalition already has suffered through one rough period in recent weeks stemming from differences over Peres' approach to the Middle East peace process.

In the midst of the fray, the foreign press and Israeli newspapers have danced a strange ballet with each other, the former gleaning nuggets of disclosure from the latter, and the latter using the former to circumvent strict local censorship regulations.

The result has been a deluge of confusing disclosures.

The only official pronouncement that the Israeli government has made since Pollard was arrested by the FBI on Nov. 21 has been a one-paragraph statement issued two days later by Foreign Ministry spokesman Avi Pazner. It said that "Israel's political leadership received with shock and consternation" the report of Pollard's alleged espionage activity and that if true, it would be a "deviation" of a long-standing policy against such intelligence-gathering in the United States.

The statement appeared to be intended to deny, albeit obliquely, any high-level political involvement. However, it did not stem a flow of published reports, some speculative and vaguely attributed, suggesting that Pollard's alleged spying activities had been known at high levels.

Gradually emerging as a central figure in the case is Rafael Eitan, one of Israel's most famous intelligence operatives and a former adviser on terrorism to Peres and former prime minister Menachem Begin.

Eitan, no relation to the former Army chief of staff with the same name, is widely known for his legendary covert operations, including his role in the abduction in 1960 of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann.

The manner in which Eitan's name surfaced was revealing of both the fierce competition by the Israeli press for new details of the spy scandal and of the role of the Israeli military censor in the lives of journalists.

Last Sunday, the Hebrew daily Davar, which is sympathetic to Peres' Labor Party, carried an article linking Pollard's alleged activities to a former adviser to Begin who, by the newspaper's description, could have been none other than Eitan. However, the name was excised from the article by the chief censor in Tel Aviv and remained out of public view for the next two days.

On Tuesday, two other leading newspapers, Haaretz and Yedioth Aharonot, named Eitan as the man purported to have recruited Pol-

lard, citing as the source of their information an article in the Tuesday editions of The Washington Post. However, Eitan's name was not mentioned in The Post's account, which referred only to an official who once worked for Begin on security matters. The Post's article, which was written in Washington and attributed to "unofficial Israeli sources," said that the newspaper had withheld the man's name "since no reliable source has tied him directly to Pollard."

Because the rules of Israeli censorship provide that information printed or broadcast abroad can be quoted by the Israeli news media, the Israeli editors published Eitan's name, even though, because of the seven-hour time difference, they were publishing their Tuesday editions before the Post published its first edition.

The newspapers said later that their Washington correspondents had thought the Post was going to publish Eitan's name and that there had been no deliberate attempt to circumvent the censor.

A similar scenario unfolded in reverse two days later when The Washington Post reported in its early editions in an article written in Washington that the English-language daily, the Jerusalem Post, had reported that two Israeli diplomats who were abruptly recalled because of their alleged association with Pollard had worked directly for Eitan. One of the diplomats worked as a science attache in Washington and the other as a science counselor in the Israeli Consulate in New York.

Eitan, after leaving his job as terrorism adviser in the prime minister's office in October 1984, retained a dual post that he had held as head of a scientific intelligence-gathering office in Tel Aviv called the Science Liaison Bureau, and known by its Hebrew acronym, Lekem. The office, which is attached to the Defense Ministry but has acted as an independent annex to Israel's established intelligence agencies, routinely posts to embas-

NEWS
ANALYSIS

sies abroad employes, who while registered as embassy employes, report to Lekem and not the Foreign Ministry.

The Jerusalem Post article, however, had made no reference to the science attaches having worked directly for Eitan because, according to the newspaper's editor, Ari Rath, the dispatch by its Washington correspondent was censored heavily and the material linking the diplomats to Eitan was excised.

Referring to the use by Haaretz and Yedioth Aharonot of information those newspapers thought The Washington Post was publishing, Rath said today, "Our stories are mutilated every day by the censor. Without the American press, the Israeli press here could not have told even that bit of the story."

One report, broadcast by ABC News in the United States and widely replayed in the Israeli press, was that the FBI was investigating reports that Peres or one of his aides met with Pollard while the prime minister was on an official visit to Washington five weeks ago.

A Peres aide tonight described the report as "utter nonsense."

Israeli officials also denied pub-

lished reports that Eitan attended a meeting of the Cabinet last Sunday and was praised by Peres and other ministers for supporting Israeli policy.

The most substantive government leak of information about the Pollard case was reported yesterday in The New York Times, which reported from Jerusalem that Peres, Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, acting as a committee, had investigated the matter and had concluded that the Israelis responsible had not informed ministers "on the political level" that they had an American agent providing secret information to them.

The Times article, quoting a "highly placed Israeli source," suggested that Israel had used Pollard because it had learned that the United States had been spying on the Israeli military. Pollard's information, the sources said, indicated that the United States had "penetrated" the Israeli military and that Israeli officials decided they had to seek more information to find the source of the intelligence leak.

Israeli diplomats in Washington recommended yesterday that concerned friends of Israel asking for guidance on the Pollard case read the account in The Times.

The New York Times correspondent in Jerusalem, Thomas Friedman, said that he did not submit his article for review by the Israeli censor and that he was not summoned

to appear before the censor after it was published.

The apparent purpose of the leak, however—to disavow any knowledge of the spying operation on the part of Peres and senior Cabinet ministers and lay the blame squarely at the feet of a free-lancing Eitan—could backfire on Peres and create a crisis in the ruling coalition.

Eitan is a close political ally of and was assistant to Trade Minister Ariel Sharon when Sharon served in the mid-1970s as security affairs adviser to then-prime minister Rabin.

If Eitan is unwilling to shoulder publicly the responsibility for Pollard's alleged spying activities and thereby relieve Peres and other Cabinet ministers of suspicion of having had knowledge of it, Sharon could use the issue to create a Cabinet crisis, some political analysts here said.

Repeated attempts to contact Eitan today were unsuccessful. In his only public comment so far, Eitan said earlier this week that his name had been linked to the Pollard case "by mistake."

Sharon, who has been visiting South America and the United States on a speaking tour, nearly precipitated a collapse of the coalition government earlier this month when he refused to apologize and retract statements he made criticizing Peres' efforts to initiate peace negotiations with Jordan.